

**Address (bilingual) at the
Strategic Partners' Meeting: A Dialogue on ICTs and Poverty**

**Geneva, Switzerland
December 8, 2003**

**Maureen O'Neil
President, International Development Research Centre**

Friends, colleagues, distinguished guests—good afternoon, and welcome. Chers amis, chers collègues, distingués invités, je vous souhaite la bienvenue. This is a full and busy week for all of us interested in ICTs for development, and my first obligation—on behalf of IDRC—is to thank every one of you for joining us here today. And on behalf of all of us, let me thank the Government of Canada and the Permanent Mission for their generous hospitality. We are grateful.

Our agenda for this brief gathering is both simple and ambitious. In a moment we will be treated to the “world premiere” of a very short video report on a forum held at Harvard University in September—an exceptionally productive exploration of how ICTs can generate poverty reduction and foster development even in the poorest countries. Then we will open our meeting to a free and lively discussion—leading, I hope, to a clearer sense of how we might proceed, as partners, to exploit the promise of these astonishing technologies. Dans quelques instants, nous assisterons à la « première mondiale » d’un

bref compte rendu vidéo d'un forum qui s'est tenu à l'Université Harvard en septembre dernier et qui a permis d'examiner de façon très productive comment l'utilisation des TIC peut mener à la réduction de la pauvreté et au développement, et ce, même dans les pays les plus pauvres. Nous aurons ensuite une discussion libre et animée, à l'issue de laquelle nous saurons mieux, je l'espère, ce que nous devons faire, dans le cadre de nos partenariats, pour tirer parti des possibilités qu'offrent ces formidables technologies.

It is an honour and a pleasure to acknowledge the presence with us of some who participated in that

**Harvard forum: Onno Purbo, Richard Simpson,
Michael Spence, Ichiro Tambo, and Frederick
Tusubira.**

**We all understand that information and
communication technologies, under the right
conditions, can serve to reduce poverty, empower
communities, and promote political and economic
development. In fact, we already have ample
evidence of these beneficial outcomes in some very
different settings. Nous savons tous que, dans les
bonnes conditions, les technologies de
l'information et de la communication peuvent
réduire la pauvreté, responsabiliser les**

collectivités et favoriser le développement politique et économique. En fait, nous avons déjà de nombreuses preuves de ce genre de retombées bénéfiques dans des contextes fort différents.

But what are those “right conditions” in which ICTs advance development for poor people? And more to the point, how can tested and proven good practices be scaled up for widespread and sustainable effect?

At the Harvard forum, participants answered these questions in what I would call three

interconnected themes for research, policy and action.

The first theme is the urgency of creating the right policy environment to enable both commercial and social ICT innovation and development. This means, among other things, devising and implementing regulatory regimes and fiscal policies that favour and reward ICT investment.

The second theme that I heard in the Harvard forum is the central role of digital entrepreneurship. In the end, creative entrepreneurship will make technologies, services

and content accessible, affordable and useful to poor people in their own communities. Again, the challenge here is to identify successful applications and scale them up.

The third theme at Harvard concerned the immense payoff in forming new ICT alliances with partnerships already active in the development field. I would specify four kinds of coalitions in particular: those working for women in development; for education, and especially for girls in education; for democracy and good governance; and for health. In each of these

realms, ICTs can dramatically accelerate pro-poor development.

As I say, these are ambitious propositions. But as a modest start, let's now watch the little CD-ROM that IDRC has produced from the Harvard forum. After that, I will ask three respondents to comment briefly. And then we can all join the discussion.

[CD-ROM plays]

[President introduces three respondents for five-minute comments; names to be decided]

[President moderates open discussion]